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IS MANKIND WORTHY OF PEACE?

WILBUR M. URBAN.

I.

ON A hundred battlefields—out of unnumbered skulls, monuments were raised to Genghis Khan. Of what consist the monuments of Cæsar, of Attila, of Napoleon? In the last analysis, though indirectly of the same stuff. War is war. Whether it be waged in the name of barbarism or civilization, through blind lust of power, for honor or for still nobler motives, war is war. Must it always be, must it through all the long ages remain the same? Is this worthy of humanity? More than ever at the present moment must man ask himself this question—at this moment when even the poets, those eulogists of war, draw back with cries of horror: this is no longer merely war, but some nameless diabolical thing—undreamed of by very Mars himself.

The idea of a perpetual, universal peace has always stood on the human horizon as a self-evident, self-illuminating ideal. One must indeed be blind of heart and mind not to see it. The laying down of weapons, universal disarmament, war against war, the brotherhood of nations, universal arbitration, the union of civilized peoples into a world state, the establishment of a high court of the nations before which all the disputes of the nations can be brought, and which would treat any nation which threatened the peace precisely as the single nation treats the disturber of the peace, the murderer, the criminal—is not this eirenic ideal the hope of every right-feeling man, the goal toward which all the moral and political development of mankind points and which will earlier or later be attained? And if our heart is convinced, is not our reason also? For, so the usual analogies run, as it has been possible to bring the many egoistic individuals into the peace-

ful and peace-conserving unity of the state, so is it possible, at least in principle, to bring the many egoistic nations into the more inclusive unity of a world state or federation. The idea is self-evident, the induction seems at the first glance indisputable. And so, for more than a century and a half, a long series of minds of the first order—from the Abbé de St. Pierre and Rousseau to Kant, from Kant to Cobden, and Elihu Burritt, and from these to Tolstoi and the innumerable peace advocates of the present day, this idea of a perpetual peace has been worked out more and more completely and pressed home to the hearts and minds of men. If then—despite all this, the idea is still greeted by many with an ironical shaking of the head, by others declared in deepest sorrow to be still a phantom from Utopia, must it not be because in all our discussion there is an element in the problem not yet adequately taken account of—some unknown factor that disturbs the entire reckoning?

II.

It is the belief of many that the peace propaganda has been gradually passing from the utopian to the scientific stage. Despite widespread theoretical acceptance it is now generally realized that the earlier proposals are without results. A universal tribunal would have practical value only when there stood behind it a supreme power, a highest neutral world power as greatly superior to single peoples and nations as the single state is to its citizens and subjects. Failing this, and so far as human calculation goes, the future contains no promise of such a world state; the only practical constructions have been treaties and balances of power, the limitations of which are obvious. On the other hand, the hopes of Kant and others, placed upon the gradual growth of commerce, have been put to shame by the unexpected developments of commerce itself—the quite unforeseen treason by which trade has taken to itself all the principles if not the accoutrements of war. The proposals of the World Peace Foundation with its League to Enforce Peace, are held to be more scientific

in that they build upon existent practical constructions of treaties and balances. Yet, in so far as nations know no law but necessity, manifest destiny and sacred egoism, such a league is powerless. When President Lowell candidly recognizes that a "nation can hardly bind one to wage war on another with which it has no quarrel, to enforce a decision or a recommendation of whose wisdom or justice it may not itself be heartily convinced," he has admitted all the utopian "water" with which the stock of the Foundation is so generously filled. All honor to those who do any thinking at all upon this question. But no candid or thoughtful man will overvalue such thoughts. Under the surface of the League, the volcano will still glow and rumble, ready to break forth, now here, now there, in ever new craters.

Of a totally different sort are the proposals of that chief apostle of the peace propaganda in modern times, Leo Tolstoi, with his doctrine of non-resistance. This, at the first sight the most visionary and impracticable of all peace proposals, really goes most deeply to the heart of the matter. In the hands of International Socialism it has undergone a development which has tended to lift it from the sphere of the utopian into the world of the actual. The "break-down" of Socialism at this point has created much sadness, and more secret satisfaction. But if it be true, as there is every reason to believe, that the plans of mobilization of several of the great European states included orders for the arrest and imprisonment of Socialist leaders, it is proof that the propaganda, though it had not gone far enough, had at least reached the point where it was taken seriously as "war against war." Since the great war itself, Mr. Bertrand Russell has worked manfully to raise the principle of non-resistance from the realm of emotion to that of reason, to extend its application from individuals and classes to peoples and states. An amused toleration of the "fatuous philosopher" has been followed by conviction under "the defense of the realm" act. But one such determined and consequent thinker as Mr. Russell is worth

more to the peace propaganda, if it is to be taken seriously at all, than all the Hague Tribunals. One French Socialist, deserting the colors because the promise that he should not be compelled actually to fight was not honored; returning to his little school house, there to remain quietly until he was found and taken out to be shot; one such school master is worth all the Leagues to Enforce Peace. Mr. F. B. Vrooman finds something infinitely amusing in our American peace talk—that we should “count on stamping willy-nilly, a Chataqua civilization upon the rest of the world.” Of such stuff is much of pacifism made. But not Tolstoi’s, not that of International Socialism. Neither attempts that combination of contradictories so disastrous to the moral health of babes and sucklings,—a milk and water Christianity with the corrosive acid of modern competitive industry.

III.

That which makes this latter sort of propaganda powerful is an absolute belief in the absolute value of peace. This conviction underlies all consequent pacifism. It is the possession of this faith that makes the utopian forms strong; the lack of it which makes the practical forms ultimately and essentially weak. This leads us to a second deeper and really fundamental question: whether then, lasting peace among the nations is unconditionally desirable, whether it is an absolute postulate and ideal.

There are those, of course, who praise war just as there are those who praise egoism. They are, for the most part, honorable, honest, and deep-thinking men, thoroughly convinced and far from frivolous. With their arguments we are thoroughly familiar and, at the present moment, have little patience. Nor is there any need to point out the equivocations and sophistries of these arguments, historical and biological. They have been made entirely familiar by a long line of criticisms of which Viscount Bryce’s Atlantic Article is but the splendid culmination. Enough! If we played with these ideas before the war, we

are in no mood for them now. Yet at this very moment let us remember that we not only played with them, but that they were, and still are, the secret *credo* of a large part of us. Between the Treitschkes and Bernhardis and many of us quiet citizens, the only difference is one of courage and logic. With what dismay must many an Englishman have seen his own real convictions expressed openly in the opinions of Earl Kitchener, made public by Mr. Richard Barry after his death. "We shall always need and always have soldiers. Without the military spirit nations decay. The basis of all sound government is the military spirit. As for industrial, commercial, and economic life, I would say that nothing in it can endure without the military spirit." Now it is one thing to praise war. It is another thing, of course, to hold that it is necessarily implicit in the forms and values of our civilization. But war is not made by its eulogists, but by those who consider it inevitable. Not by those who accord it unstinted praise, but by those who call it, even grudgingly, a conditional good. Nietzsche's dictum, that "there has never been a bad war," may rouse our fiercest indignation, and we may feel very virtuous over our feeling. But until we cry, "there has never been a good war"—and until our conception of humanity and civilization makes that cry inevitable, perpetual peace is a phantom from Utopia. Is peace then an absolute good? Whether we will or not, we are forced to ask this question.

We hear much of the ignobility of "peace at any price." Ordinarily it refers to peace at the expense of national honor or supreme interest. But the same principle may be extended even to the ideal of universal peace itself. Let us assume that the longed-for goal were reached; that war were definitely abolished, that all the nations on this terrestrial ball formed a world state, etc., etc. There would still be the question whether mankind would be worthy of all this glory. Suppose this pacified human race consisted wholly of men given up to material interests and pleasures, little souls without any sense for the great and the noble—to what end were such a race of pitiful

souls in existence at all? Suppose international peace were assured for all time, but only because mankind had become a race of weaklings and cowards, whose need of peace arose only from fear of pain and death—what would this everlasting peace be worth? Suppose finally, such a peace, brought about only by egoistic and material interests, were used only for the peaceful exploitation of the lives and energies of men? Would this laughing, golden age (!) be better than an age of iron, of successive wars of noble virile nations pursuing their ideals, and after the work of war is done, turning all their energies to science and the arts and crafts? Enough! Peace in itself is not unconditionally desirable. It is not a categorical but only an hypothetical imperative. Quite apart from the question whether such a peace could be lasting, it would be wholly lacking in worth. This is the eternal truth in all the exaggerated and dithyrambic cries of "Human, all too human," in the "Everlasting Nay" against all civilization and morality that make prosperity and peace an unconditional good. *Only then is perpetual peace worthy when mankind is worthy of that peace.*

Here then is the crux of the whole matter. From this fundamental axiom all serious discussion of peace, ideal or practical, must proceed. I fancy most men know this in their hearts. It is this interior knowledge,—of some inescapable, some *a priori* relation if you will, between the value of peace and the worthiness of our humanity and civilization, that makes us so impatient of much of pacifism. It is the belief also in an equally necessary relation between the present ideals of civilization, and the values of war, so honestly expressed by Earl Kitchener, that makes us skeptical of most practical proposals. When a man feels himself unworthy of the object of his desire and love, it is no mere abstract sense of unworthiness, but a very concrete and genuine doubt as to whether he is the sort of man that could keep that love. When men beat their breasts and cry out that they are unworthy of heaven, it is partly at least because, like Mark Twain's Captain Storm-

field, they do not know what in heaven's name they would do with it when they got there.

IV.

Here then we stand at the point where these two questions may be seen to merge into one. Is the pacifist ideal possible? Is it unconditionally desirable? They are inextricably bound up together and the nature of their subtle connection can now be brought to light. Peace is desirable only when mankind deserves it. But it is possible also only when he deserves and earns it. At the beginning we asked, is war worthy of humanity? Had we not better ask, is humanity at present worthy of anything but war?

There are two kinds of skeptics that must always be carefully distinguished. There is the cynic, skeptical because he holds mankind in such low esteem, and the ironic, skeptical because he holds him so high. To the latter we should always listen, in the matter of peace, as in all other fundamental questions. Is man's inhumanity to man a defect mostly of morals or of intelligence? Is stupidity or malignity the chief source of war and all its horrors? To the ironical critic this has always been a disputed question. However it be answered, there can be little doubt that in all that concerns his thoughts and labors for peace man's unworthiness is shown as much in defects of intellect as of will. Consider the whole long story of our peace projects from those of St. Pierre and Rousseau to that of the League to Enforce Peace. One is at a loss to know whether the persistent fallacy that dogs their steps proceeds mostly from the heart or from the head.

Everywhere, even within the most civilized societies and states, endless strife rules—strife between classes and parties, between labor and capital; and often enough, despite the entrance of the police and even the military arm of the state itself, it ends in bloody war, with its quota of dead and wounded. How can one expect that, when even within the single state or nation strife and war have no end, they can be ended between individual nations which

recognize no common end, no *summa potestas*? "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?" This is not merely religion—it is good psychology and common sense. Surely its quotation here is neither irreverent nor beside the mark. Or again, is it not usually the very minds who minimize the value of law in the individual state, because forsooth "law cannot make men good," who expect wonders from it in precisely that sphere where it lacks the very power that gives it force; who when the most sacred rights of the individual in national and civic life are violated in the interest of business and property, still expect that the more intangible and uncertain customs misnamed international law, will hold against the strain of nations and cultures fighting for their existence; and who, when their own civic and national life is shot through with "official lies," are shocked when the "scrap of paper" appears in international relations?

One may well ask whether this is the kind of intellect likely to be able to grapple with the problems of world peace. No less lacking in the power of irony are all those arguments which infer the possibility of peace from the working of the rational self-interest of the nations. To all these a diabolical instinct replies "they reckon ill that leave me out." Rational egoism is still will and may throw off reason at any time. "Sacred egoism" is still egoism, and when sanctity enters the mouth, reason may at any time fly the head. One of our college presidents has naïvely wondered why men can continue to gamble when all calculations show that in the long run the laws of chance work against them; are those who cannot understand why nations will go to war when the interests of commerce and industry are against it, in any different case?

After all, it is the same kind of intellect that thinks in terms of vigilance committees, that still talks of violations of neutrality and invasions of nations in terms of robbery and murder. Is such intellect capable of thinking out the problems of peace? Is the kind of intellect that dismisses

the one hopeful principle, the one that goes to the root of the matter, because it has broken down (when no one should have expected it to do anything else but break down at this juncture) and grasps at methods that have done nothing but break down through all the centuries—is such intellect worthy? It is an old saying that men are known by the ends they seek. Even more surely are they known by the means they choose to reach their ends. It is precisely in the discussion of means that the total lack of a sense of the irony of our thought is revealed.

But this indwelling irony is merely symptomatic of something deeper. The condition of a valuable peace is that mankind shall be worthy of it. We are still morally unworthy of peace because we do not yet value it highly enough. We do not yet realize what it is for; it is a good that we do not yet know rightly how to use. Something of this feeling is undoubtedly at the back of the heads of those who praise war. They still have the uneasy feeling that peace may mean degeneration if we do not know how to use it aright—that there must be some “moral equivalent” for war, and that mankind has not yet found it. We may scoff at them, but can any one deny that this is part of our moral unpreparedness for perpetual peace? If this is true, it is important, but what I have in mind goes much deeper. Briefly and bluntly, it is this: *we are morally unworthy of peace, because when we have it we know how to use it only for the purposes of war.* Is this paradox? If so, it is only because on this point the human heart is itself paradoxical. But let us see.

We speak of the profound peace that preceded the present war. With Pecksniffian airs we bewail the splendid civilization that naughty men would destroy. This is how that profound peace, that splendid civilization appeared to one of us at least. “Greetings from the nineteenth century to the twentieth, in shorthand, by Mark Twain: ‘I bring you the noble matron, called Civilization, on the return journey from piratical expeditions to Kiautschau, Manchuria, South Africa, and the Philippines, soiled and dis-

honored, with her pockets full of booty, with her soul full of deceit, and her mouth full of hypocrisy. Give her soap and a towel, but hide the mirror.' ” The essence of all war is the use of the lives and deaths of men as means to ends—whether the ends be the personal egoism of despots, as Rousseau thought and some simple people to-day think, or whether they be the over-individual ends of expansion of commerce, civilization or what not. All war implies a certain calculus of the lives and deaths of men. But this valuation also underlies all our activities of peace. We use peace for the same ends. I do not say that there has been no growth in the sense of the incommensurability of the value of a human life and personality. From the days of Wehr-geld—when a life had its definite money value, when you could purchase the life or honor of a female slave for a bit of gold—history proves the contrary. I do say, however, that the development is by no means sufficient to make peace either possible or desirable. So long as the ideals and values of peace are what they are, they will inevitably and rightly, when the crisis comes, lead to the decision of war.

The truth of the matter is that the problem of peace involves certain principles and practices which no country, not even our own, has ever acted upon—or indeed fully acknowledged to itself. “The struggle for trade need not, it is true, necessarily lead to war. But, conducted as it has been in the past, war is the logical result. The diplomacy and the armies and navies of the various governments have all been, in one form or another, the partners of commerce. When commerce is hard pressed, it calls upon its partner, and with that call comes the possibility of war.” Not only has this been so in the past. Witness the French and German crises in Morocco, and the whole history of the opening of China! At this very moment in England the Anti-German League proposes to maintain British prosperity by keeping Germany and Austria in a permanent state of impoverishment—by preferential rates among the allies, by placing prohibitive duties upon Central European

trade, by refusing German vessels access to their ports. The Central powers, on their side, discuss making a similar offensive and defensive union against their enemies. The vicious circle is complete. Mankind seems bent on proving that we know how to use peace only for the purposes of war. Who that is conscious of the silent but certain growth of "over-seas finance" among ourselves, can doubt that we are like to prove the same thing?

If intellectually unworthy, still more then is mankind morally unworthy of peace. It has often been maintained that every fallacy of thought really goes back ultimately to some moral obliquity of feeling and will. In all that concerns our practical judgments at least, certainly it is not without a strong dash of truth. At least to talk of the principles of humanity and liberty in politics, and not to see that they apply equally to commerce, is to talk either as a knave or a fool—probably a little of both. The first condition of the enforcement of peace is to stand against those principles and methods *in peace* that directly lead to war. I am not saying that savage commercialism is not necessary and inevitable. Perhaps it is. My sole contention is that the civilization in which it is inevitable is incapable of peace. Still more, that the civilization incapable of seeing its own irony is both intellectually and morally unworthy of it.

V.

To some this may seem to be but a belated *a priori* argument against the peace ideal itself. To some it may even suggest that rather famous dilemma against Socialism which not only has a place in the logic books, but still lurks unchallenged in some incorrigible minds. Why advocate Socialism? it is asked. Until men are perfect, it is impossible. When they are perfect, it will be unnecessary. So here. Why advocate peace? Until men are worthy of it, it is impossible. When they are worthy of it, it will come of itself. Of course the answer is that in neither case is there a dilemma. Men are neither wholly perfect or imperfect, neither wholly worthy or unworthy. They are

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in a transition stage and the very advocacy will help to bring about the worthiness that will make the desired goal possible. In insisting upon this necessary relation between the moral development of man and the possibility of those things that make for his peace, I have, therefore, not the least desire to assent to the stupid fallacy which underlies so much of our prate of "necessary progress" and lends itself so easily to the gospel of things as they are. The problem of perpetual peace, like the problem of social good, can be solved only *in ambulando*.

With the peace ideal itself I have no quarrel. The whole question is as to the nature of its advocacy. Am I wrong in thinking that what we need here above all is irony? Of sentiment and moral indignation we have had plenty. Of specious argument more than enough. What we need is irony—and again irony. In time of peace prepare for war; should we not rather say, in time of war prepare for peace? If so, is not a large part of that preparation precisely the discipline of intellect and will that shall enable us to know the things inherent in peace that lead to war? What shall it profit us if in the emotional ideology of the present we shall have forgotten that which we had almost learned before the war broke out? Mr. Bernard Shaw rightly doubts the capacity of an English Secretary of State to negotiate peace "on the assumption that he is engaged in a crusade against certain sentences of Treitschke," and who, as is evidenced in Sir Edward Grey's recent interview, "after two years of reflection talks the same moral humbug as under the first shock of war." Is it with any less right that we doubt the capacity of many of the self-appointed secretaries of state to humanity, who set out so valiantly to negotiate perpetual peace?

On a hundred battlefields, and out of unnumbered skulls, monuments were raised to Genghis Khan. Must it always be? Must it through the long ages remain the same? Somewhere or other Carlyle describes how Tamerlane, in glistening armor, his battle ax over his shoulder, stood before the gate of Damascus and watched with satisfaction

as his soldiers built a pyramid of the seventy thousand skulls of his conquered enemies. "But," he adds, as a consolation in the face of this monstrous fact, "perhaps at the same moment there was playing on the streets of Mainz with his comrades, a boy who should later discover the art of printing, namely Gutenberg." Consequently printing with all its consequences, even if they are all good, *compensates* for a Tamerlane! This way of valuing expressed by Carlyle even more brutally in a hundred places, is still the type of valuation that underlies our civilization in peace as well as war. I do not say that it is not the true way. That is a question for itself—and by no means easy of answer. It is possible that, as many are contending at the present time, western civilization, even in the short distance it has gone, has been guilty of a morbid evaluation of the individual and the individual life. Into this question I do not go. I simply contend that so long as this way of valuing remains fundamental—and modern evolutionary thinking but confirms it—perpetual peace is a dream as indeed it should be. Must it be so? Is war with all its horrors, worthy of mankind? I do not know. All I know is this. War is worthy of mankind, just so long as man is no more worthy of himself. The horror of war is with us. But, as history and present experience alike teach us, that horror, like everything else emotional, becomes blunted by time and use. There is only one thing ultimately intolerable, and that is a contradiction at the heart of life. Here only irony avails.

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